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EMBASSY VILNIUS FOR THOMAS P. KELLY
EMBASSY GUATEMALA FOR ALEX FEATHERSTONE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/23/2017

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SUBJECT: FIRST LADY SENATOR CRISTINA FERNANDEZ DE KIRCHNER
ON VENEZUELA, RCTV, AND HER TRIP TO WASHINGTON

REF: SECSTATE 52361

Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On April 20, Ambassador Wayne delivered reftel points to First Lady and Senator Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner and noted that during her May 3 visit Washington interlocutors might raise this issues as well as the status of draft legislation on counterterrorism finance and anti-trafficking in persons in the Argentine Congress (septels). First Lady and Senator Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner claimed that she would be the "first to criticize" should the Venezuelan government take actions that would threaten democracy in Venezuela, but insisted that, in her opinion, "Venezuela is a democracy with full press freedom." She characterized the pending BRV takeover of RCTV as a "government decision not to renew a concession". She stated that Argentina "is a friend of the Venezuelan people", and quickly added, "and the Venezuelan government", reiterating the oft-heard claims that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez "helped Argentina when no one else would." END SUMMARY.

12. (C) On April 20, Ambassador Wayne and poloffs called on First Lady and Senator Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner to discuss issues that might be raised during her May 3 trip to Washington, including support for democracy in Venezuela and for passage of draft legislation criminalizing TIP and terrorism finance in Argentina (septels). On Venezuela, the First Lady stated that she would give her honest opinion about the government take-over of RCTV if asked, but that she would suggest redirecting questions on RCTV to the Venezuelan Ambassador in Washington. The First Lady said that she believes there is full freedom of the press in Venezuela, and that the BRV takeover of RCTV is simply a government decision not to renew an expired TV concession.

13. (C) Continuing, the First Lady asserted that Argentina "is a friend of the Venezuelan people", and then quickly added, "and the Venezuelan government". She also reiterated the oft-heard claims that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez had "helped Argentina when no one else would" (reiterated publicly by cabinet chief Alberto Fernandez in the press this week). Fernandez de Kirchner stated that the GOA disagrees with the USG view that the GOV is a threat to democracy internally and in the region, opining that she sees differences between the U.S. and Venezuela as a conflict between Bush and Chavez and not between the people of the two countries. When asked about her trip to Venezuela to address the Venezuelan Jewish community, she claimed that she told

them that she would be the "first to criticize" the Venezuelan government should it take actions that would threaten democracy in Venezuela. She added that in her view the GOV is neither a threat to democracy, to the Jewish community, nor to the United States.

14. (C) COMMENT: Many political analysts in Buenos Aires have suggested that a Cristina presidency would take a more distanced approach to Venezuela than President Kirchner. Despite her stated appreciation for Venezuela's aid to Argentina, Cristina listened attentively to Ambassador Wayne's points on the importance of supporting democracy and freedom of the press in Venezuela. While echoing President Kirchner's sentiments on Venezuela, she also admitted to "loving the U.S." while reminiscing about a previous trip to Northern California. END COMMENT.
WAYNE